

# Exchange Completed In 10 Trips

## Last Flight Brings Chiefs Once Held In High Ransom

By Charles E. Taylor  
MIAMI, Dec. 24 (UPI)

The last of 1113 Cuban invasion prisoners, ransomed from Cuban Premier Fidel Castro in a Christmas Eve wrapup of a 53-million-dollar airlift to freedom, landed here tonight.

Castro announced at the same time he would send to the United States at dawn on Wednesday some 1000 relatives of the prisoners seeking refuge from Cuba now that the invasion captives are free.

And prisoners exchange negotiator James B. Donovan, who flew home aboard the last of three plane loads of prisoners, said he had obtained

"certain pledges" from Castro for early release of 23 Americans held in Cuban jails.

The New York attorney called it a "Merry Christmas finale" to his "Operation Mercy."

His plane, the last of the 10-flight, two-day airlift, landed at 9:35 p. m. (EST.)

Castro played a game of cat and mouse earlier in the day, delaying the departure of many of the prisoners by staging a big air show with Russian-built Mig jet fighters in airspace designated for the Mercy planes.

Aboard the windup flight were the three invasion leaders who once had a \$500,000 ransom price on their heads and the son of Jose Miro Cardona, leader of the Cuban Revolutionary Council, the

exile group that sparked the abortive April 17, 1961, invasion.

After about 90 minutes of official welcoming, processing and a hot meal at the air base, the prisoners boarded buses to go to Dinner Key Auditorium in Miami for the reunion with their families and friends.

About 3000 exiles waited to cheer and weep over the men who spent 20 months in Castro's jails, then take them home to the Christmas trees, presents and soft beds so long unfamiliar.

In New York, meanwhile, Chairman Peter McChesney of the Committee of American Steamship Lines said the Committee had been assured by the Cuban dictator that he would permit some 1000 relatives of the prisoners to leave Havana at dawn Wednesday aboard the freighter African Pilot, which carried 1800 tons of ransom goods to Cuba Saturday.

Cuban authorities informed McChesney that Castro was freeing the relatives as "a Christmas bonus to the ransom deal."

The airlift began Sunday, halted Sunday night, started again this morning, then faltered again until the final surge tonight.

The air show by about 36 Mig jets was held near the San Antonio airbase on the outskirts of Havana, departure point for the prisoner airlift.

The first Pan American World Airways plane of the day—and the fifth of the two-day flight to freedom—landed at Homestead Air Force Base at 10:23 a.m. with 109 passengers aboard.

A second plane arrived at 11:50 a.m. with another 108 aboard to be fed and processed at the base 20 miles south of Miami.

Four Pan American planes were waiting at the Cuban embarkation point at this time, but once again the hours passed and at 3 p. m. they still were sitting there without having been given takeoff clearance.

Finally the green light flashed and the Red Cross announced that the third plane load of the day had lifted off from Cuba at 4:33 p. m. (E.S.T.) carrying 175 passengers.

At 5:33 p. m. the plane

touched down at Homestead. There had been an unexplained lapse of more than 5½ hours before it departed Cuba.

It was the third such aggravating delay for the remaining prisoners' families and friends after a 10-hour delay through most of Sunday, after which four planes loads were evacuated and a 13-hour overnight holdup, although U. S. plane crews had volunteered to "work through the night."

E. Barrett Prettyman Jr., a Washington attorney who worked with Donovan in setting up the prisoner exchange, returned meanwhile on one of the flights and said he could not promise that all of the prisoners could be freed by tonight as the exiles hoped.

"There is nothing wrong but these things take time," he said, evading questions as to what "things" were delaying the takeoffs.

Increasingly angry members of the Bay of Pigs Brigade accused Castro of "fiddling around just to aggravate us."

They pointed, as example, to how he withheld takeoff orders Sunday until he had inspected manifests of the African Pilot, the World War II freighter which carried most of the originally promised list of supplies to Cuba. Then he also inspected eight cargo plane loads of perishable supplies with maddening deliberation, lounged for a while beside the airstrip in a brand new U. S. automobile and finally at Donovan's insistence gave the "go" signal for the first four planes.

Then he closed down the

airstrip again on the pretext that he did not want the prisoners flown out at night.

There was only one stretch-er case among the early arrivals and, in general, the men appeared healthy.

U. S. immigration officials who accompanied the men on the flights from Cuba said they filled the planes with shouts of "Viva United States" and "Viva President Kennedy" as they winged toward Miami.

Emotion-charged scenes developed as the new arrivals were greeted by waiting comrades in arms from among the 60 invasion prisoners who were sent to the U. S. "on credit" by Castro last spring.

Most of the prisoners quickly discarded the clean shirts and pants which Castro officials had given them before their departure and put on clothing issued by American authorities.

Checks for \$100 were also available for each prisoner. After lunch, served on mess hall tables covered with immaculate white tablecloths, the happy men were taken by special buses into Miami.